

Nebraska Commission for the Blind
Public Meeting, Saturday, February 4, 2017
4600 Valley Road, LMEP Room 101
Lincoln, NE

MINUTES

Call to Order. Welcome and introductions. Announcement concerning public comment periods, meeting agenda, open meeting act, proof of publication, recording & other logistics.

Mike Hansen, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Mike Hansen, Chairperson, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Lincoln; Robert Newman, Vice Chairperson, Omaha; Mark Bulger, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Chad Bell, Alliance.

Commissioners absent: Becky Rieken, Executive Secretary, Dakota City.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln; Carlos Servan, Deputy Director Client Services, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director-HR, Lincoln; Wes Majerus, Program Manager of Technology, Lincoln; Bill Brown, Business Manager III, Lincoln; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor, Lincoln; Shane Buresh, Transition Coordinator, Lincoln; Eric Buckwalter, VR Counselor, Lincoln; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor, Omaha; Matt Hackert, Center computer instructor, Lincoln; Carol Jenkins, Center Supervisor, Lincoln; Carrie DeFreece, Business Manager II, Lincoln.

Public present: Shari Bahensky, Client Assistance Program Director, Lincoln; Bridget Brown, Omaha; Lucian Brown, Omaha; Ahmed Alsaray, Lincoln; Jeff Peters, Lincoln; Brandon Peters, Lincoln; Barbara Epworth, Omaha; Lisa Kelly, Outlook Nebraska, Omaha; Chris Brennfoerder, Lincoln; Jim Jirak, Omaha; Dale Oviatt, Omaha; Kathy Fox, Omaha; Kenda Slavin, Omaha; Brad Loos, Lincoln; Barbara Loos, Lincoln; Oscar Becerra; Jenna Mares; Jason Bond; Pleh Meh; Miquel Rocha.

It was noted that public comments are welcome during the scheduled Public Comment Periods regarding the agenda items or other relevant issues. Wes Majerus recorded the meeting and the recording is available on the website. Lunch will not be served as the meeting is scheduled to adjourn at 12:45 p.m.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available in both print and Braille format. The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website, NFB Newsline® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACBN, NFBN, and the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of the November 5, 2016 public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Bell moved to approve the Minutes of the November 5, 2016 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Bulger seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Transition and Pre-Employment Transition Services (PreETS)

By: Shane Buresh, NCBVI Transition Coordinator

NCBVI has long demonstrated the commitment and belief in the need for transition services as early as possible in a young person's life. Meaningful work experiences, exposure to successful adult role models and training in independent living skills have long been the hallmark of who we are and what we offer. Frankly our belief in young blind persons is one of the greatest attributes that we have because it truly sets us apart from our peer agencies in every positive way. We know that these kinds of opportunities are too often not available for blind and visually impaired students and young adults as they grow up and we stretch ourselves and our mandates to provide every experience possible to enhance and enrich the lives of transition youth. Simply put, we are driven everyday by the goal we share with each young student we serve to reach the dreams they imagined for themselves.

As you no doubt know, in 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) revised the Rehabilitation Act placing even greater emphasis on Pre-Employment Transition Services, (Pre-ETS), promoting a smoother transition from school to adult life. We have certainly been challenged by this change in focus but as articulated above we are not rookies at this game and we have enthusiastically embraced these changes which call on us to assist students with navigating the core principles that WIOA identifies for youth ages 14 through 21: Job Exploration, Work Readiness Skills, College and Post-Secondary Exploration, Work Based Learning Opportunities and Self-Advocacy Skill Development.

In order to help conceive and facilitate programming to meet the above requirements and to aid in strengthening relationships with school personnel, families and potential employers, in September 2015, NCBVI hired a Transition Specialist. While this individual does work with youth directly on occasion and does assist counselors through advice or direct consultation when meeting with youth, the role of this Specialist is largely to innovate, plan and execute a number of programs and initiatives which are designed to increase and sustain greater independence and confidence for the youth we serve through the transition phase of their lives. Detailed below then are summations of much of our most recent work in the area of transition particularly in the way of programs, which is the subject of this focus topic.

Winnerfest

This program is a retreat style program held twice each academic year for students who are blind or visually impaired ages 14 through 18. While this program is centrally

located it is open to Nebraskans from across the state. To give you an idea of the breadth and scope of this program and to demonstrate the impactful way we address the WIOA requirements, we have included brief summations of the past two programs. They reflect a changing landscape or evolution from content which was completely counselor created and presented to world class programming which truly gives our students a competitive advantage in knowledge not possessed by their peers.

The Spring Winnerfest was a collaborative effort between NCBVI, We Fit Wellness, a Colorado based company dedicated to the reversal of sedentary and unhealthy tendencies among the blind, and the United States Association of Blind Athletes, the nation's leading organization for recreation and competitive sports activity for blind persons of all ages. It was entitled: "I Fit, You Fit, We Fit. During this program 22 youth were empowered to engage in better nutrition practices, exercise more and develop more appropriate eating strategies during the teen-age years. They were also exposed to a wide range of activities some unique to blindness and others were adaptations on the classics. These included swimming, judo, goalball, bowling, volleyball serving, basketball shooting, football throwing, kickball, cardio drumming exercising and strategies for exercises in places or situations without available equipment. Students also gained leadership skills and engaged in conversations during working meals that not only covered nutrition topics but also leadership and self-advocacy. The program even empowered the students to advocate for ongoing discussion to consider how to better market Winnerfest to their peers.

The fall Winnerfest was expanded by an additional day from traditional length in order to accommodate the "Next Generation" training presented by the Dale Carnegie Corporation, which was adapted from their world renowned leadership trainings specifically for our Pre-ETS youth. While other youth have taken "Next Generation" training and more than 8 million individuals have taken Carnegie leadership courses, it is the belief of both the local Carnegie franchise and NCBVI that this program was the first of its kind for blind students in the country. There were 20 participants who received leadership techniques, soft skills, social skills, self-advocacy skills, stress reduction strategies and work and school based readiness communication training presented in a targeted format that appealed to their age group and life experiences.

Blind and Socially Savvy

In an effort to prepare our Pre-ETS youth to be better self-advocates, improve their social and soft skills and gain confidence beyond their average sighted counterparts to help them put their best foot forward in employment, school and everyday life settings, NCBVI provided a workshop entitled Blind and Socially Savvy. This innovative training took a renowned social skills and business etiquette curriculum from the International School of Protocol and adapted it to the unique needs of blind youth. The students learned leadership skills, social etiquette, continental dining skills, how to network, how to dress for success and much, much more. The students hosted two separate networking events where strangers to them from the world of business came to a social event to meet them and one another. The students handed out their own business

cards and made a tremendous impression on others for themselves and for NCBVI in general. The program concluded with a three course graduation dinner where the students demonstrated their newly acquired dining skills and the students received a certificate for completing 40 hours of training.

The Blind and Socially Savvy program was offered and completed by 23 Pre-ETS youth and was conducted in two sessions. Once to all the participants in our summer WAGES program, which is outlined below, and a second time in a stand-alone group for youth 14 through 21 not in that program.

WAGES

This past summer, WAGES (Work And Gain Experience in the Summer), a 6-week program held in Lincoln, provided work, blindness skill enhancement and life experiences for 17 blind and visually impaired students ages 16 to 21. Thanks to the increased focus on Pre-ETS services under the WIOA, we were afforded the opportunity to expand this program and the number of participants this past summer represented the largest group in the program's history. The positive benefits of this expansion were felt by both students and staff alike. Commission staff from all three geographic districts and instructors from the Nebraska Center for the Blind were all directly engaged in providing blindness skill and work based job site training throughout the duration of the program. In fact, members of the Nebraska Center staff developed and created the skill training curriculum and materials which were utilized.

Just as it has for more than 20 years now, WAGES offered a wide array of experiences, as participants lived on UNL city campus, utilized public transportation and engaged in many recreational activities beyond their jobs. For the first time this summer all of the 17 youth completed work hours at both community based employment sites and in-house training with commission staff. Through a half day schedule, each week participants completed approximately 15 or more hours in each of these settings. WAGES Students worked a wide variety of jobs. Here is a sampling: St. Elizabeth's Hospital delivering sheets, gowns, and other essentials to different parts of the hospital; Capitol Humane Society cleaning bowls and delivering pots and pans; Antonio's Tastes of Lincoln operating a cash register and serving food; State Capitol Tours conducting tours; Southeast High School doing custodial work; Latino American Commission gathering information for a database; Aging Partners preparing and serving food and odd jobs; and Lancaster County Records Department shredding documents and data entry.

One additional expansion to the WAGES program this summer was an out of state trip to a blindness consumer convention. The purpose of which was to expose the participants to adult blind role models and empower them through the stretching of their thoughts about what they can accomplish in their lives. In addition, the trip afforded the students the opportunity to put their newly acquired skills into practice. Many NCBVI staff and contracted staff chaperoned the WAGES participants and their families on this trip. It was by all accounts a very successful endeavor. Whether it was flying and

leaving Nebraska for the first time or simply navigating a hotel independently with a long white cane, everyone grew through one experience or another. In fact, the growth in the students was tremendous and they emerged as a group who sees their blindness as a part of them not a barrier to who they will become.

In an effort to try and capture this growth and to empower the students to make the program better by shaping it with their input, we entered into a partnership with Gemini Research, a survey provider in the blindness field. The goal is to survey the WAGES students and assess their knowledge take away on many aspects of the program especially the new additional training and new format. As of this writing the results are not back to us, but it is our hypothesis that through programs such as Blind and Socially Savvy and Wages students will have articulated knowledge gains in WIOAs Pre-ETS key areas.

reBoot Camp

In an effort to strengthen our relationship with parents and teachers and to provide the most accessible and contemporary technology and technology training needed by blind and visually impaired transitioning youth, NCBVI conceived and conducted the first ever “reBoot Camp”. This workshop was completed in a retreat format and was designed to instruct students in the use and benefits of the iPad and voiceover technology. 37 youth received iPad Pros, a bundle of productivity applications, including the KNFB Reader, and a digital curriculum to help the learning to continue on into the future. Also to keep the learning going, we included teachers and parents, so that those in the student’s support system also had the information their youth received and could help learning take on a greater dimension after the program concluded. This aspect of the reBoot Camp has been praised by the education professionals who often are unable to keep abreast of technology developments and who are often not able to assist students with technology they have learned from NCBVI at programs since they were not in attendance.

There were two full days of direct instruction for all and evening breakout sessions designed specifically for students and parents to meet and discuss their own specific accommodation issues. Individuals from the Omaha Apple store were also in attendance as luncheon speakers, which is a very unique event as Apple rarely allows their instructors to attend other groups’ training sessions. In conclusion the more than 75 persons who attended for one reason or another will all look back with pride that they attended the first reBoot Camp for blind youth in Nebraska.

Project Independence

Each summer NCBVI hosts a four day blindness skill immersion and recreational opportunities based summer camp entitled “Project Independence” or PI. This past summer 14 youth between ages 6 and 13 attended. The theme was “Come Sail Away With Me”, an off-shoot of the empowering quote, “A ship is safe in a harbor but that isn’t what ships were built for”. Attendees participated in a competition for completing typical daily tasks entitled: home chore challenge; as well as, taking air boat rides, learning to

listen for birds, doing audio archery, building and racing their own rain gutter ships, completing a “wordle” project (for self-esteem building), cooking their own dinner over the camp fire, running their own ice cream shop, taking a field trip into Omaha, and much more.

District Based Programs

Pre-ETS youth also participate in programs on an on-going basis at the local or district level through a variety of group teaching opportunities. The Omaha District holds two monthly groups they entitled TABS (which is for middle and high school students) and Jr. TABS (elementary aged students) and a brand new biweekly group TSG (which is a skills training group for middle and high school aged students by school district or region). TABS focuses mainly on job exploration, work readiness and self-advocacy skills. Students build data sheets, resumes, talk about grooming and soft skills etc. Many of these same youth attend the TSG group to focus more on blindness skill acquisition such as cooking, braille, cane travel etc. On a quarterly basis parents also attend a parallel session to discuss issues and build a peer network that they can leverage for advice on IEP rights, best practices for their students, etc. Jr. TABS teaches these same blindness skills to elementary aged students with the occasional field based activity, such as, bowling under sleep shades, attending descriptive movies or plays, etc.

The Lincoln District also brings in students K-12 district/territory wide monthly on a Saturday. These meetings are a combination of items mentioned above with activities involving both blindness skills, job readiness skills and field based activities to practice their newly acquired abilities. Recent examples include the escape room and holiday related skills.

In conclusion, while the transition program continues to grow in influence through partnership in the education and employment community, it truly is the NCBVI programs themselves that are the backbone of what makes our services the best available to Pre-ETS youth anywhere. The investment made by all involved at every level of the organization, from this Board to the newest staff trainee is remarkable. The belief in and the time and effort taken to carry out these events is an investment that will pay dividends both immediately and in the future in the lives of those who have participated.

Some Transition clients spoke about their experience working with the NCBVI Transition programs.

Breana Prochazka – She was available via facetime to give her presentation. Breana stated that she really enjoyed the WAGES program and she found it to be very helpful to her. She felt she developed a good relationship with the owner and her co-workers. She worked at K-9 Design during WAGES this year and last year she worked at the Malone Center. She enjoyed the job at K-9 Design as she got to work with animals and bathe them. Brianna stated that she would like to change the WAGES seminars so that

the clients can have their own session about how their week has gone. Breana noted that she feels she has matured a lot because NCBVI gave her a chance.

Breana also attended the Blind and Socially Savvy, and re-Boot programs. She stated that Blind and Socially Savvy taught her table manners, how to dress for work, and how to act when you are in public. She said this was a great experience. Breana did not think that the re-Boot program would be beneficial to her, but it definitely was and the things she learned she uses in her everyday life.

Ahmed Alsaray – He stated that he came to the USA in 2014 from Iraq. After becoming blind, he was unable to get the help and support he needed in Iraq. If you are blind in Iraq you will just do what you have to and no one will help you. When he came to the USA he was happy with all the help that was available to him. In January 2016 he heard about NCBVI so he went to Winnerfest in March 2016. At Winnerfest he met a client who did track and field and earned a medal. He began to realize that if others can do it, he can do it. Winnerfest also taught him how to be a leader. In March 2016 he joined the track team and said he did pretty good in his first track meets, but then his leg became injured from running too much. In the summer he joined the NCBVI WAGES program and he met kids the same age as him with different experiences on how they deal with their life. Ahmed stated that he was very impressed and again he realized that if they can do it he can do it. In the fall he tried out for the football team and the coaches were impressed by him.

In Iraq Ahmed stated that he was a top student and he studied for about eight hours per day. Ahmed noted that after he came to the USA he learned the English language in two years.

Ahmed stated that he attended reboot where he learned how to use the telephone without using his eyes. The WAGES program taught him to be independent and how to take care of himself. He worked at Selleck cafeteria during WAGES and there he would cook and do dishes. Ahmed continues to work at Selleck cafeteria.

Lucian Brown and his mother Bridget Brown – Both Lucian and his mother grew last summer by participating in the programs. Lucian grew in his independence and Bridget grew by letting her son go out and spread his wings.

Lucian stated that WAGES was a huge opportunity for him to spread his wings and get to know everyone that he knows now. WAGES taught him how to be a good employee and taught him leadership along with many other skills. When attending WAGES, the group attended the National Federation of the Blind Convention in Orlando which he truly enjoyed. While all the programs he attended were beneficial, he felt that WAGES was the most beneficial for him.

The Winnerfest program was a huge milestone for him because it taught him to get used to being around other people and being away from his family for a little while. He

was nervous the first time he was away from his family but it was a great opportunity for him to get some help that impacted his life for the better.

Lucian also participated in the TABS program wherein he helped clean up downtown Omaha. He enjoyed going into individual training with Omaha counselors Kathy, Tim and Kelly and Omaha District supervisor, Nancy. They taught him cooking and keyboarding and he is still learning.

During reBoot Camp he received an iPad and he got to stay in his own room at a hotel. He had the opportunity to navigate the hotel and find many of the amenities. This gave him a great opportunity to gain some independence.

Bridget Brown – Bridget talked about the benefits of NCBVI and the programs. She stated she wishes that she knew about NCBVI when Lucian was younger but she didn't. In that last four years Lucian has made some remarkable strides with the help of NCBVI. Every time Lucian attends a program he grows and gains independence. Bridget noted that she appreciates how accessible the staff at NCBVI is to parents. She noted that she calls the Omaha office a lot and speaks to Lucian's counselor Kathy Brown-Hollins. Bridget stated that Kathy not only helps Lucian, but she helps her. Lucian has gained a lot of independence with the help of NCBVI. Bridget noted that she has three older children who were born without disabilities. When Lucian came she did not know how to help him. NCBVI staff has helped her a lot and took many of her fears away.

Brandon Peters and his father Jeff Peters – Brandon stated that the WAGES program is the first NCBVI program that he has participated in. Through this program he learned some valuable skills. Before attending WAGES he was always frustrated because he could not get his own medication because it was not labeled. Before attending WAGES he was given a medication keeper wherein he could tell the different days of the week so he would know which medication to take. He was also taught other independent living skills. During WAGES he also learned what true friends were. He has had friends before, but he never really had friends that got him involved in outside activities and that wanted him to have fun. This is something he will never forget.

Brandon stated that if technology training is implemented into the WAGES program again he would ask that the choice of screen readers be more diverse and that other screen readers besides JAWS are promoted.

Brandon stated that he would recommend to anyone going to WAGES to just take things as they come, advocate for yourself, and get it done.

Jeff Peters stated that they became aware of the NCBVI and the opportunity to sign up for WAGES in early 2016. Brandon met Shane through a Visually Impaired Persons (VIP) club wherein they developed a friendship. When he and his wife as parents found out what WAGES was about they were terrified because it meant that Brandon was

going to go somewhere for a period of time which was longer than he had ever been away from home before. One or two nights away from home was about the most he had been away. Seven weeks seemed like a long time and they did not know what to expect. They took a leap of faith and they are glad they did because Brandon learned a lot. Brandon worked on his travel skills. Before, Brandon was extremely fearful about going to a bus stop, getting on a bus and going to his employment which was the YMCA. One of the key things in the program was learning to navigate independently. Jeff stated that Brandon enjoyed the WAGES program and it gave him a sense of confidence. One of the funnier things was the fact that Brandon has very good PC skills, but for some odd reason he could not email, facetime or call his parents every night when he was attending WAGES. They actually had to talk to the group leader and ask them to tell Brandon to call his mom. They soon learned that Brandon was okay and he was having a lot of fun with his friends. During WAGES Brandon learned that if you want to work and make money you need to learn to work with other people, do your job, do it right and accept accountability for what you are doing. Jeff stated that as a parent he is very proud of everything that Brandon has accomplished.

Shane Buresh reported that they are going to record some mini pod-casts relating to the Transition program which will be posted on YouTube. One of his ideas of a title of the series is Making Change Makes Sense. Shane invited the Commissioners to attend some of the NCBVI programs if they would like. In conclusion Shane said "We don't have to be who we were; everyone can change."

Public Comment

Kenda Slavin – Kenda asked Lucian's mother and Brandon's father what was the hardest lesson they learned or the hardest thing for them to control within themselves in order to give their children the freedom to advance as far as they have.

Bridget Brown stated that for her the hardest thing was allowing him to be around his peers because he has been subjected to a lot of bullying and he needed a lot of help with his social skills. Lucian had a hard time with social skills and being in other people's space. She worried a lot about her son being bullied.

Jeff Peters stated that he worried about Brandon's independence skills because he lacks experience in this area. Letting Brandon go to WAGES was a big fear of his and his wife's. When Brandon has to work with others to define strategies, he can come back and teach him things. It is not that you want your child to fail, but sometimes they need to fail before they can succeed.

Dale Oviatt – Dale stated that he attended the Nebraska School for the Blind and he graduated in 1966 which is over 50 years ago. He attended the School for the Blind when he was eight years old because it took that long for someone to realize the reason he was not making it in public school. Dale stated that he has not had a connection with NCBVI in a long time and he asked if there is a system in which children are identified early in their life by local school systems so the child can be connected with NCBVI

early in their life. Dale asked if the public school system was good in providing information to parents and families about NCBVI.

Chair Hansen stated that there are Memorandums of Understanding between NCBVI and the Department of Education in regards to the relationship between NCBVI and the public schools. However, a lot of things are changing with the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA). Chair Hansen asked Director Van Zandt to speak on the issue.

Director Van Zandt stated that communicating throughout the lifespan of consumers, educators and other service systems is an on-going process. There are definitely educators out there who call NCBVI the "Adult Agency" thinking we serve only adults. For decades NCBVI has had programs for children and we have had counselors going to families' homes and talking about the resources, teachings and techniques. In every office of NCBVI the staff are communicating with the educators in their counties and trying to get to know them. NCBVI is also working with the Department of Education at the State level to reinforce that we are here for people of all ages. NCBVI has always thought of transition starting at birth. It is an ongoing process. Chair Hansen added that there is currently not a requirement for a school to notify NCBVI of a child with a visual impairment. NCBVI is working hard to build the relationships we can with the Department of Education and the network of teachers for the visually impaired throughout the State of Nebraska to make sure that they are informed of what we can offer and to let them know that we are not an alternative to their services, but we are here to complement their services.

Director Van Zandt reported that next week the Department of Education is putting on a Transition Conference, which they do every year. A number of NCBVI counselors will be attending this along with her. Director Van Zandt noted that she will be on a panel and they will be talking about services and what NCBVI can do.

Jim Jirak – Jim noted that he has known Nancy Flearl for over 34 years and the Omaha staff seems like they do a very good job and they are on top on things. Jim stated that he wants to give a shout out to the Omaha staff.

Jim noted that he was introduced to NCBVI when he was attending high school in Omaha. He did not get to go to Nebraska City because Omaha Public Schools did not want to send him there because it would be tax dollars leaving their district. In his case, he was introduced to NCBVI when he was about 13 years old.

Break – A break was taken at 10:44 a.m. The meeting resumed at 11:00 a.m.

Commissioners' Reports

Chairperson Hansen stated that there has not been a lot of activity for the commissioners to report for this quarter due to the holidays. All the commissioners do a

lot of things relating to the blindness community on an ongoing basis, but there is nothing specific to NCBVI to report on.

Report from the Executive Director

February 4, 2017

Activities and efforts since November 2016:

Developed and gave Testimony to the Nebraska Unicameral Appropriations Committee regarding potential four percent cut in funds for the current State Fiscal Year. The result was that the committee restored funds to NCBVI; our state funds will remain in the budget. We are communicating with budget analysts about the Biennium Budget request. There is no action about it yet, in the Unicameral. We do have a Budget Hearing scheduled for March 2nd at 1:30 PM.

Renovations in the Lincoln offices are complete except for the NBE equipment work area at the East end of first floor, and a few minor tasks in the Center. The facility looks very professional now. Norfolk offices were given new carpeting in December, which is a nice upgrade.

We are in process with a search for new apartments, through a formal Request for Proposals (RFP). The current lease is up July 1; we will be visiting potential new sites in early February.

AWARE Kick Off began with meetings to plan, form teams, establish timelines and get rolling. A lot of work has been done already and will continue this year to implement the new client database system. Many staff members are involved with the process; they have been positive in their efforts and commitment. More detail is provided later in the Technology Section of this report.

We met with AS Purchasing and CIO representatives to discuss purchasing of equipment needed for clients. Agreements were made to make the process work more effectively. I submitted a request for expanded authority to purchase technology (software, hardware, apps and access equipment) for clients. The idea was agreed to in the meeting. We also initiated a request for a state contract to be developed with the regional provider for many of the vendors of access technology. This is in process; it should help to ease the path for purchasing technology for clients.

We continued attending WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act) Core Partners Meetings with Nebraska Department of Labor, Education/Voc Rehab, Unemployment, and Adult Education colleagues. We are also a part of the Nebraska Partner Council which pulls in entities beyond the core partners to put WIOA into action across the state.

I went to the Radio Talking Book offices in Omaha, for a tour and to learn more about their current operations. We talked about ideas for expanding their funding sources. We also talked about how to make sure that NCBVI staff members stay informed about RTB Services. I assured the RTB staff and Board that we will continue to inform applicants and clients about the system, helping them to apply for RTB and helping with

equipment use when needed. The RTB Director will likely be in touch with our Supervisors to attend office meetings across the state.

Attended a Regional meeting of VR agencies in Des Moines. We discussed how our colleagues are managing the new regulations, especially regarding WIOA and PreETS.

Became a part of a new Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Task Force, established by Governor Ricketts. Meetings will be monthly for a time, as the effort is established; then will likely change to a quarterly basis. Exactly what it will do and how it will function is yet to be determined.

Attended monthly Agency Directors Meetings for information on budgets, new laws, and other aspects related to managing State of Nebraska agencies.

Attended Quarterly NBE Blind Licensees Committee meeting.

Met with Voc Rehab and Nebraska Department of Education/Special Education about PreETS services and how we can collaborate to meet the needs of students with disabilities. We are working on a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on this topic.

Worked with Julie and Bill to finalize and submit quarterly and end of year federal reports.

Met with the Director of Voting Rights with Nebraskans for Civic Reform about issues related to access to voting. I gave her information about our agency and the consumer advocacy organizations that she might want to contact.

Met with our newly hired Business Manager II, Carrie DeFreece. She has begun six-week Center Training this week. She will be a fine asset to our Team.

Ongoing work:

Weekly meetings with Leadership Team on many issues

Attended Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee for Lincoln/Lancaster County

Continued work on strategies and procedures to address audit findings and recommendations

Attended Supervisors Meetings

Attended occasional conference calls for NCSAB Executive Committee

Participated in Friends of the Commission meetings/conference calls

Service Statistics from Julie Buren

During the first quarter of Federal Fiscal Year 2017 (October 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016), we served 505 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients in all statuses. Of the active VR clients, fourteen (14) were closed having achieved their employment goals. Twenty (20) were closed without achieving employment (refusing further services, unable to locate, death, transfer to another agency, and other). Four (4) clients were

closed before a Plan for Employment was developed. There were 328 Active VR Clients as of December 31, 2016.

In the Independent Living (IL) track, 312 clients were served, in all statuses. Of Active Clients, seventy five (75) were closed successfully achieving their goals; nine (9) were closed without achieving their goals (withdrew, moved, deceased, and other reasons). At the end of the December 2016, there were 188 Active IL Clients. The majority of these (186) are Senior Blind. One client is 37; one is 13 years old.

Center's Quarterly Report

With the Holiday Season as a part of this report, the Center wasn't as active as usual because clients went home to spend time with family for the Holidays. If you have any questions, please let me know. Thanks! Carol Jenkins

Dates: 11/6/2016-2/4/2017

Currently: 8 Clients, 1 O & M Apprentice, and 1 Staff Trainee

2 New Clients

1 O & M Apprentice

1 Staff Trainee

2 Three Day Stays

Tours: A staff member from Lincoln Public Schools, a staff member from Omaha Public Schools, Union College Social Work Students, and three agency consumers

Activities: Pie Baking, Thanksgiving Luncheon where clients were able to invite family and/or friends, Volunteered ringing the bells for the Salvation Army, Money Budgeting activity at Gateway Mall, Decorated the Christmas tree, December Holiday Party, and Food budgeting and pricing.

Some Center Staff Attended: Motivational Interviewing training, Motivational Interviewing Skill Building, completed some cross training and refresher training at the Louisiana Center for the Blind and the Colorado Center for the Blind, and have completed some training courses as a part of Lynda.com.

Center Supervisor: Continues to speak to all NCBVI districts on Center changes and updates, continues to participate in monthly Center Director's conference calls, continues to help other states with their training centers (South Carolina and Alabama mostly), and is working on the AWARE adaptation team.

Additional Notes: We had clients attend a seminar on Uber and Lyft as well as a Hadley School webinar on "Why Community Service, and What's in it for me?" The Center students and Center Supervisor will also attend the NCBVI Board of Commissioners meeting on February 4, 2017.

There are still some final small remodeling projects that need to be completed in the Center and hopefully it will be completed soon.

An RFP (Request for Proposal) has been done for the Center Apartments, and I or Dr. Van Zandt will send out notifications of what is happening as we move forward.

Lincoln District Activity Report January 20, 2017 by Connie Daly

Stephanie Wagle has completed her center training and has been working in the field for a month. She has a strictly transition caseload. She has been working 8:00 to 5:00 as she gets training in the field. Her hours will change to include early evening hours as she learns her job. At this time, she is meeting her clients and shadowing other counselors. Eric Buckwalter is carrying a smaller caseload and he will devote more time to our media efforts.

We have transferred Rock and Keya Paha counties to the North Platte district in an attempt to balance our caseloads across the state.

Amy and Stephanie finished Leadership training through Project ALL (Academy for Local Leadership). We had our second session of Motivational Interviewing. Our team has really appreciated this training and implementing these strategies. Counselors are excited about how well this method works to help clients find their own direction.

We have been working with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity partners to develop a comprehensive plan. We will have partner meetings every month with case managers to learn more about what they do and how we can collaborate together to serve Nebraska.

Reboot! has started up again. We have four people attending our job class. It will run for twelve weeks. [NOTE: this is a job class in Lincoln; different from the reBoot Camp]

We plan to have two day home teaching sessions and see if this is something that we can manage in our schedules. Clients gain more confidence after two consecutive days of training rather than one.

We had a teen group where we focused on holiday activities such as baking cookies, dipping pretzels in chocolate and wrapping presents. We also talked about how to host a get-together. We will have an elementary aged group home teaching, where we will make heart-shaped pizzas, make some crafts and play a trivia game.

I have been working on the adaptation team of AWARE.

We had clients get jobs as a cashier, Mental Health Therapist, NBE Vendor, Daycare worker and customer service representative. We helped clients maintain work as a NBE Vendor, Word Processing Technician, and Statistical Clerk.

Highlights Omaha District February 2017 by Nancy Flearl

We have had several placements in Customer Service. Ten closed successful (status 26) since October. Our clients have had lot of active interviews. We are faced with a

growing number of businesses that are making upgrades to their operating systems and they no longer work with screen reader software. I have posed the question to the Rehab Net and USBLN about how we can best educate our business partners. We are also facing all or most employers have assessments that are not accessible. We have been working with HR departments locally for accommodations.

We are doing group teaching sessions every week with our transition students. We have an established schedule where we are focusing on Independent Living Skills and Workplace readiness skills based on Dr. Karen Wolfe's transition materials. We are looking to integrate employers we are working with that have a focus on working with youth. We have a growing number of youth with an interest in the IT field. Not all fields require a 4 year degree to get started. There is an Omaha coding school/Omaha Interface School that focuses on web development that allows you to think like a software engineer. We will have Shonna Dorsey join us for a session to discuss these resources.

We have a number of teens graduating this spring and are stressing the importance of the College workshop and Center training.

We had a parent meeting and activity on 12/28 and had 19 parents and 17 youth between ages 12-18. The next meeting will be in March.

We are working with the Chamber of Commerce and will have staff and students working with "careerokit". This is a weeklong event in April designed to bring businesses and students together, offering career experiences that will educate, excite and inspire tomorrow's workforce.

We have been working with hiring drivers, but have not had a lot of success. The individuals we have approached have not been interested in a contract position, or have not had clean driving records.

We have a new vendor working here in our state office building. Things are going well and appreciate the work that Don has done in getting this site up and running. Several other consumers have expressed an interest in the program. On that note several counselors attended the last quarterly Blind Licensee meeting here in Omaha. We had 3 consumers that attended as well.

We have done intensive outreach to all the high schools in our district and are now looking at middle schools and institutions of higher learning. We maintain close contact with all the local TVIs (Teachers of the Visually Impaired) serving the surrounding school districts.

We have staff working on various agency programs: Winnerfest, College Workshop, etc. We continue our contacts with Project Search.

Several counselors are working with the Metro Placement Professionals. They have taken tours and networked with HR on their hiring needs. A few of our business partners are Oriental Trading, Hy-Vee, Nebraska Medicine, Cintas, Embassy Suites, Hilton, etc.

Tim and Kim continue to co-locate and there are great connections with business rotating in to do on-site interviews. We are working with Heartland Workforce Solutions that is using National Career Readiness as a tool to market to employers about an applicant qualifying and readiness to work. This is not an accessible program with JAWS, so we are working with ACT (American College Test) to address this issue.

Elaine has submitted a request to the Governor's Office for a date for Helen Keller Deaf Blind Awareness Week. It is in June. She has also put in a request for interpreters for that day. With Cheryl retiring at the end of the year, we will be transitioning the deaf blind registry to Elaine.

We have in the past had one counselor that focused on deaf blindness, but have been building these skills in several counselors. I found that as I got someone trained then they left.

Tim and Kathy have been attending the State of Nebraska Leadership Program. They did a short evaluation of the Missouri program and felt that it was good have the face to face versus on-line. We felt that the VR focus of Missouri's program would have benefit. A blend of the two would be ideal.

Larry, Kathy and Tim worked with AWARE team in late November/early December and will continue to do what is needed for this transition.

North Platte (NP) District Highlights by Erin Brandyberry

This past quarter clients gained employment at Grand Island Public Schools, Region One office of Human Development, and as an NBE vendor. We have 1 client starting a work based learning experience at Pizza Hut. We received 29 referrals in our district during the last quarter. One client started Center training.

We have made 2 new referrals to Easter Seals for Benefits Counseling and have 5 clients working with the Abilities Fund to reach their self-employment goals. Counselors educated clients on accessible voting methods. NanoPac came to 2 of our offices to show us the newest line of assistive technology.

Counselors attended the second MI training in November and a follow-up training in January. Cristal and I attended the Introduction to AWARE training in December. I attended my first session of NRLI in January and found it to be extremely valuable. Deanna is involved in the Aging and Disability Resource Center Advisory Committee for both Kearney and Lincoln. She continues to facilitate the Kearney Area Aging Services Coalition and is on the Brain Injury Advisory Council. Cristal attends monthly Project

Search committee meetings. Jan, Diann, and Fritz were heavily involved with the North Platte project search team. Cristal and I attend monthly community connections meetings. Angie participates in the WIOA planning committee for the Scottsbluff area. Diann has been involved in the Winnerfest planning committees for both November 2016 and March 2017. The Kearney office attended some Chamber of Commerce events to increase awareness of our agency in the community.

Bob Deaton Highlights

2016 Annual Report to the Governor submitted

2016 IL annual 704 report submitted

2017 PILBO grant application approved for \$10,000

Introduction to motivational interviewing completed by Casey Jackson in November 2016; first skill-building session conducted by Casey Jackson in January 2017

Quarterly Report on Transition Activities by Shane Buresh

As the Board of Commissioners was last meeting on November 5th, 20 Pre-ETS youth and a number of staff members were wrapping up a very successful fall Winnerfest. It was entitled Generation Next and was presented by Dale Carnegie Training. In the tradition of "How to Win Friends and Influence People" but conducted in a manner that was structured to appeal to youth, this program addressed many skills that were designed to enhance communication, build relationship skills and reduce stress for students. Highlights included interactive exercises in the five drivers of success: building greater self-confidence, strengthening people skills, enhancing communication skills, developing leadership skills and techniques for reducing stress and improving attitudes. The defining moment speech, which was a two minute address where each student told the audience about a pivotal moment in their lives and what lessons we can learn from their defining moment. This activity was very empowering and emotional as it was nothing short of indescribably remarkable to see them open up and share their personal stories with such grace and confidence. There were 12 principles for how to induce willing cooperation in others and how to break out of their own negative cycles. The 9 principles for leadership building, such as, how to motivate others and how to better think on their feet and talking about your own mistakes before discussing someone else's, asking questions of others rather than giving them orders, letting the other person save face, helping build another person's reputation and making the other person happy about doing the thing you suggest. For the public recognition activity they spoke in recognition of another peer for something that they admired about them and why. And last but certainly not least, the inspiration talk, which was a speech about someone who inspired them and why and what lesson they and we could learn from it. Certainly, there was much more I could relate but suffice it to say that this training gave them a set of skills that all of us use and wish we had known earlier in life, and a set of techniques which can give them a leg up in many of the areas that WIOA is asking us to ensure that they experience success.

During this quarter, I have also continued to create, build and strengthen relationships within the transition and/or blindness fields. I have met with Brigid Griffin, the Transition

Specialist with Nebraska VR, to compare service delivery models and collaborate on ideas regarding WIOA implementation strategies. In addition, I once again participated in the annual meeting of the stakeholders committee at NCECBVI. I also presented at several UNL teacher prep classes with a number of future vision and special education instructors in attendance. On a few occasions, I even went out into the field to conduct lessons with clients either in conjunction with other staff or to assist them with service delivery.

During this quarter the transition consultation and guidance project with Dr. Gary Meers really saw a ramp up in activity. As you may recall, this project seeks to leverage the knowledge of Dr. Meers, an internationally respected transition consultant from Nebraska, to innovate a series of action steps or a guidance document if you will, that staff can use in their work with Pre-ETS clients, particularly in the area of after school work and college preparation activities. By the time of the commission board meeting, Dr. Meers and I will have been to face-to-face meetings with all counseling staff to gain insight and best practices for what makes our services work, so we can share them statewide and in some cases find gaps in services that are keeping us from having a more unified transition program.

Even though we just had a tremendous ice storm, it isn't difficult to imagine spring and summer and the flurry of activity about to begin for the Pre-ETS students. The Winnerfest this spring is a collaborative effort between NCBVI, and the International School of Protocol, who brought us Blind and Socially Savvy last summer. They are back with an entirely new curriculum based around emotional intelligence, in fact, the Winnerfest is entitled: "Blind and Socially Savvy" Strengths Series: Harnessing the Power of Emotional Intelligence for Self-Advocacy and College Success. Its programming will be interactive and will introduce students to various aspects of team building and individual skill acquisition for improving time management, self-awareness, self-advocacy and much more.

Later on in March, we will once again be holding a college workshop, jointly sponsored with Nebraska Association of Blind Students, (NABS). Hoby Wedler, a blind chemistry instructor and entrepreneur will give the keynote address, he will conduct accessible science activities and discuss how students can take non-traditionally blind friendly subjects, and also, will address self-advocacy and tips for college success as a blind person. This seminar will also have many other offerings from both NCBVI and outside collaborators to motivate and inspire the current or contemplative blind college student.

WAGES will also be held again this year with a number of the innovative changes we made last year back once again. The program will begin this year on Friday June 2nd with an opening weekend kickoff seminar from the folks at Blind and Socially Savvy which will set a workplace like tone for the program and give the students tools to begin their new jobs with high confidence and savvy skills.

We are in process of deciding how best to schedule participants for work and possible training; we do plan that all participants and students will attend national consumer conventions.

Project Independence (PI) will also be at the end of July several weeks after WAGES and will once again be at Camp Calvin Crest near Fremont.

Following PI in August, we will be holding the second reBoot Camp in Lincoln, which will focus on screen readers, such as NVDA and JAWS, and will focus on universal access for students at work, school or in the community.

As you can see, there is much to look forward to and I am excited to be able to be present for all of the learning and growth that is about to take place for our youth and to bring back the future report of their successes to you in the upcoming quarters.

Technology Program Report by Wes Majerus January 23, 2017

Operations

AWARE

Since the November Commission Board meeting, much has happened in the AWARE implementation project. Alliance Enterprises sent staff to our offices to kick off the project in Mid-November. There have also been two in-person trainings provided, the Intro to Assistive Technology with AWARE and the Intro to AWARE VR. These were not to train in the use of our new system per se, but were a means to show what the system is capable of and guide teams as they do future work to adapt AWARE for the use of NCBVI. Alliance has also provided some training via videoconference, including a series of meetings on the implementation strategies, and some workshops on adaptation. Once just before the February Board Meeting and once immediately after, Alliance Enterprises will come to Lincoln to guide NCBVI in adapting AWARE. We are using AWARE in an out-of-the-box fashion, so no in-depth customizations will be made. However, we will be adapting AWARE to our business practices by changing settings that already exist, filling in tables that populate dropdown lists on forms, and other modifications. Some of this adaptation effort will come in the form of "homework" where Alliance will have trained us and it will be the job of NCBVI staff to do the work independently.

The system is slated for a July 1 go-live. As July comes closer, activities will ramp up. Alliance works on a train-the-trainer approach where NCBVI designates some trainers on our staff and Alliance trains these people on how to train the rest of the staff. There will also be activities surrounding user acceptance testing, system testing, and a pilot test where the two systems (eForce and AWARE) are run concurrently for a time before go-live to ensure that the new AWARE is working as expected.

Alliance Enterprises has a number of users groups to keep its customers informed about the AWARE platform and efforts Alliance is making for upgrading it and working with third-party software. During one of these users groups, it was determined that

Windows 7 would not be supported by Alliance in the near future. Originally, I had planned that Windows 10 would be added to our users' machines as these machines were replaced. I was advised by our OCIO (Office of the Chief Information Officer) project manager that we may want to consider rolling out Windows 10 more widely. I am working to figure out how this can be done. The OCIO would prefer that all machines we wish to place Windows 10 on would be brought to their facility for imaging. I have offered to take Windows 10 media and installation instructions to each office and complete the installations myself with the help of a reader. I am also urging OCIO to work with us on remote imaging of the operating system. It will become important that we have the computers ready for use by the July 1 go-live whichever solution is chosen. I do not believe that the solution of bringing all machines to Lincoln is logistically feasible for an agency of our size and staffing level.

We continue to work with copying machine issues. Some of the copiers in our satellite offices are reaching the end of their useful lives. Since it seems that the Lexmark project did not go as I would have hoped, I am working with the State's copy provider to find machines that will produce searchable PDF files that are read by screen access technology. This process is still ongoing. Our contact with Modern Methods, the State's Copy Services contractor, is sending me different document types I request with different OCR settings so that I can see how they work with screen reading technology. I have not gotten to the end of this process yet, but it is moving forward.

The Lexmark copier project is, for the most part, finalized. Shortly after the November board meeting, Lexmark provided to NCBVI updated firmware to fix issues with the way that PDF files were emailed from the copier. This firmware allowed Apple devices the ability to read PDF files with VoiceOver through iBooks and the Mail App. This feature had been broken when we first got the replacement Lexmark, but had worked on the old Lexmark machine. Although this was a welcome upgrade, there are still issues with scanning on the new machine including the fact that it will no longer correct documents scanned upside-down. We also see that the quality of the scans are not as high with this newer machine. This is somewhat ironic since we were told that this is a much more expensive and higher-quality copier than the one we had previously. All this being said, I do not feel comfortable rolling these Lexmark machines out to our other five offices at this time.

I continue to deploy new technology. The Center will have access to an Android phone to allow for instructors working with clients that have this technology to be better equipped to assist them. We also continue to work with the BrailleNote Touches that some staff had requested. The units have been experiencing some difficulties and we eagerly await new software updates which will hopefully remedy them.

Accessibility

The Office of the CIO is undertaking consolidation and optimization of duties under the new administration. One of the ways they are facilitating this is through a Service Portal that allows for the creation and management of software and hardware issue tickets by

OCIO employees and agency staff. This system went into wide use early last year. Although it was never 100% 508 compliant or accessible, those with tech savvy and patience could consistently make the portal work to create and submit tickets. A recent upgrade to the latest version of the software has rendered the portal useless to blind staff; it is now truly inaccessible. I have been in a dialog with the OCIO, and recently, with the vendor of the portal. The vendor admitted that it was never 508 compliant and the OCIO service Desk manager doesn't know how it got past legal review since it is blatantly inaccessible. This has made it more difficult for me to interact with the Service Desk. Although there is an email account for submitting issues, this slows down many processes. Essentially, when the portal worked for me, the tickets immediately routed to the teams that work on State systems. Now, I send an email to the Service Desk, which must wait for someone to physically check the mailbox and then key my text into the portal and route the ticket to the proper team. I have seen this take as little as ten minutes or as much as five hours. If the Service Desk gets busy, emails go unchecked and tickets won't be created. I will continue to do what I can to get this system to be accessible again if possible.

H/R QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS by Dave Robinson

October 18, 2016 to January 20, 2017

1. Leonard LeBental is no longer with the agency, effective November 10, 2016.
2. The Business Manager II position was re-opened on December 8, 2016 and remained open until filled. Fifty-Three applications were received and Carrie DeFreece was hired. Her first day with the agency was January 23, 2017.
3. The temporary job postings for WAGES Daytime Dorm and Evening Dorm Counselors were advertised on January 6th and 10th, respectively and will remain open until February 3, 2017.

Dustin Wardyn was re-hired as the WAGES Coordinator and Ben Lytle was re-hired as his assistant. Dustin is working now, to facilitate the extra planning required for the program. Ben and the rest of the staff will start on June 1, 2017.

Kathy Stephens – Quarterly Highlights

Proofread and formatted the 2016 annual report to the Governor. The 2016 Annual Report was mailed to the Governor and posted to the NCBVI website. A copy of the annual report was also forwarded to all the State Senators using a feature on the Nebraska Legislature website to submit an agency report to the Legislature.

Working with Linda from Specially 4 You to put together an accessible NCBVI clothing catalog wherein staff can purchase clothing items with the NCBVI logo on it.

Served on interview and selection team for the Business Manager II position.

Worked on surplus of items as the remodeling of the Lincoln office was completed.

Made airline arrangements for two of our speakers to come to Nebraska to present at our April State Staff meeting.

Made airline and hotel arrangements for Shane Buresh to attend the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute in San Diego, California.

Made arrangements for Nebraska Business Enterprise Deputy Director to attend the upcoming Sagebrush National BEP Training conference in Las Vegas.

Business Office - Bill Brown

Items that I would consider accomplishments for the last quarter include:

- Closed out 2015 Grants and Completed Federal Reports
- Worked on RFP for New Apartment Spaces bids due on 2/2/2017
- AWARE Basic Training
- AWARE Acceptance Meetings
- AWARE Kick off meetings
- Interview and hire Carrie DeFreece
- Work with Budget Division and Appropriations Committee on Budget Questions
- Work on New FY 2017 Appropriations amendments
- Provided Staff training in procurement in North Platte
- Attended NCSAB and Randolph Sheppard training
- Working on State Board information and quick reference instructions.

Chair Hansen noted that Director Van Zandt reported that she has become a part of a new ADA Task Force which was established by the Governor. Chair Hansen stated that he is curious as to what the mission of this Task Force is.

Director Van Zandt reported that it is the Governor's ADA Task Force, but the driver of the Task Force is basically Byron Diamond who is the head of State of Nebraska Administrative Services. Some consumers had been raising the issue that Nebraska did not have an ADA Coordinator in State Government. There actually is still not a position of an ADA Coordinator, but Diamond has appointed a person to take the lead on a Task Force. This person is already a part of State Personnel. This will eventually be a State position to work on ADA issues that arise with regard to State government Boards and Commissions. The ADA Task Force does not currently have any enforcement capabilities, but it will have the capacity to take grievances and work to address situations.

Chair Hansen asked if this was just to address concerns from the public relative to accessing State resources or is this also for State staff members who are having challenges as well. Director Van Zandt stated that it is mostly for the public, but staff members are a part of the public. Director Van Zandt noted that the members of the Task Force are the Director of NCBVI, Director of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, a representative from the OCIO and some others. Director Van Zandt noted that the ADA Task Force is just getting started. As a member of the body, she would want to make sure that if a concern came to the Task Force they would not throw it out because the concern came from a person works for the State. She would hope that the Task Force

would hear the situation and use the ability of the Task Force to help make the change occur. Director Van Zandt stated that she will bring this issue up at their next meeting.

October through the end of December is a period of time when all of our annual and quarterly reports are due. Everything got submitted on time and correctly.

Director Van Zandt reported that Friends of the Commission has some projects in the works. The first is to augment the training that is available for older Nebraskans who are blind; specifically on technology. The second is a fund raiser through the Schwan's Food company.

Commissioner Newman stated that he will be sending an email about the projects to Director Van Zandt in the next week or two which can be shared with staff.

The Commissioners thanked Director Van Zandt for her report.

Budget Update

Director Van Zandt reported that for the current fiscal year the Governor wanted to decrease NCBVI's budget by 4%. They went before the Appropriations Committee and get them to restore NCBVI's budget completely. This was very good news.

The budget for the biennium covers the period of July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2019. NCBVI has the biennium budget hearing on March 2, 2017 at 1:30 p.m. We have seen the proposed biennium budget, but the Appropriations Committee had not yet started working on the biennium proposal from the Governor because they were working on the current fiscal year issues. The Appropriations Committee has now begun to work on the biennium budget and we are starting to get communication from the fiscal analyst from the Governor's office and the fiscal analyst from the Appropriations Committee. Once everything is compiled, we will be able to communicate formally about this. There are some differences between our proposal and what is in the Governor's proposal, relating to staff training, positions funded, etc.

When an agency submits their two year budget they also have to do a modification budget which is based on 8% less than a full budget request. As required, NCBVI listed things that we could cut back on and we also prioritized according to the last thing that we would want to cut. We listed one counselor position as the last thing we would want to eliminate, at the modification level. We really need to communicate to make sure the Governor's Office and Appropriations Committee understands how important our positions are. With the way that NCBVI works, "operations" which is almost entirely direct service staff, it is direct services and not administrative, etc. So far the senators are very understanding and they are impressed with the work that we do.

Some of the ways that the Governor's analyst put together the cuts and how they were funded is something that we will need to work on with the Appropriations Committee.

The cuts come out as a gross amount, but there is some purpose of this especially in these days when there are some state tax dollars and federal funds. They have a tendency to say we can spend the federal dollars but they will cut the state funds. This is counter-productive to us because we use state dollars to bring in the federal dollars. We have roughly a four to one match. NCBVI receives a little more money than we can use as match. We use all the money and we try to make sure they understand the impacts. There is a certain point where it will cost \$4.69 for every dollar that is cut. This is a major point for NCBVI.

It was pointed out that NCBVI's product is getting people back to work. A lot of our clients receive SSI or SSDI and we get reimbursement from Social Security. Therefore, our product brings back money to the State. There is also the fact that the individual who goes to work is then paying taxes and not as likely to be on benefits from the state.

Director Van Zandt invited individuals to come to the Biennial Budget Hearing which will be held on March 2, 2017 at 1:30 PM and/or communicate with their individual senators.

Newsline® Update

Nebraska NFB-Newsline®

January 27, 2017

Jamie K. Richey, Outreach Coordinator

Welcome to a new year! Looking back on this past quarter things have been busy behind the scenes. With the implementation of new bus routes and designated stops in Lincoln the StarTran category under the local channel has been overhauled. StarTran continues to make changes and I'm working hard to insure Newsline subscribers get the updated information at the same time as all other passengers. Even if subscribers don't live in Lincoln I encourage them to check out the StarTran section to provide feedback on the layout and suggestions for future transportation sections.

The national office has also kept busy this past quarter and NFB-NEWSLINE® has expanded with a dozen new publications. The Capital Gazette is the newest state publication and is an online publication out of Maryland. The other 11 publications added are all magazines and include: Athlon Sports, Bon Appétit, Brides, Car and Driver, Consumer Reports, Discover, GQ, Information Week, MIT Tech Review, Prevention and Spry Living. Where else can you browse through so many magazines at no cost to you? Nowhere, that's where, Newsline has it all at no cost to the subscriber!

Speaking of subscribers; Nebraska NFB-Newsline® currently has 1,956 subscribers. Unfortunately the stats for January can't be included in this report so I will list November and Decembers stats separately. January's will be included next quarter.

In November 7 new subscribers were added, 18,948 minutes were spent on the phone and 50.17% of those calls were made through the local number. Newsline was

accessed 6,632 times on devices such as the computer, the mobile app and the Victor Reader Stream. Subscribers accessed the content on Newsline 7,400 times throughout the month with access according every 5.84 minutes.

In December 9 subscribers were added, 17,455 minutes were spent on the phone and 52.21% of the calls were made through the local number. This number keeps going up which is great news! Hopefully more people will continue to use the local number to cut down on cost. Newsline was also accessed 6,939 times through other devices. Subscribers accessed the content on Newsline 8,016 times with content being accessed every 5.70 minutes.

This concludes my quarterly report. Don't hesitate to contact me with questions. Until next time keep warm and happy reading!

Quarterly Highlights from the Client Assistance Program

November 2016 – January 2017

Shari Bahensky was present at today's meeting to give the Client Assistance Program Report.

There was one new case that came into the Client Assistance Program relating to the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) during this time. The main issues with this case were Counselor concerns and Assistive Technology issues. At this time the case has been transferred to the Office Supervisor.

Shari Bahensky met with the Lincoln NCBVI staff in November and also met with the Omaha NCBVI staff in January and shared information regarding the Client Assistance Program and Hotline for Disability Services resources. Will next plan on meeting and sharing information/resources with the North Platte area office and the Nebraska Center for the Blind.

Also have been attending the Supervisor Meetings and Administrative Team Meetings. Will also attend some Technology Team Meetings.

Anonymous Staff Suggestion Box Submissions

Suggestion: eForce (or AWARE) should have the capability to print the client's address on the IPE or any paperwork (on the right side) so it can be mailed in an envelope with a clear window. Then, if the offices can have envelopes with clear windows and our return address with mailing code, this would save a lot of time with typing and hand-addressing envelopes or labels.

Chair Hansen asked if NCBVI staff members know who is involved in the AWARE implementation and would be a good contact for suggestions such as this.

Director Van Zandt noted that information has been sent to staff about who is on what teams, but it may not be clear as to what each team is responsible for. If staff has any questions they could certainly contact her or their supervisor.

Chair Hansen stated that he hoped that the person who submitted this suggestion did not feel that this was the avenue they had to take in order to get their suggestion heard. He is hopeful that the person simply did not know where to direct the suggestion.

Director Van Zandt noted that the AWARE system is “out of the box” and therefore, we can do minor adaptations in the drop down boxes. However, we are not customizing the whole AWARE system as the system would then be in a different price range. We certainly hope that staff knows that they are welcome to hear any ideas as NCBVI moves forward with AWARE.

Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE) Update February 4, 2017

We are training a new Licensee to manage the Department of Roads café and vending machines as the current operator is leaving by the middle of February for health reasons.

The first week of January we started to run the Omaha State Office Building vending machines. Alex Curtis is a new manager and is doing well running this facility.

We also will start our first two locations for the Department of Corrections at their main offices in Lincoln in February. We plan on adding a couple of buildings at a time to these the Department of Corrections buildings. In the next few months, we will have more opportunities for the Department of Corrections in Omaha.

New future opportunities have been requested by:

1. A new Immigration building in Grand Island for two machines starting this summer.
2. The Dept. of Agriculture in North Platte is opening a small office and wants a couple of vending machines.
3. The Historical Society has asked for another machine for their warehouse building in Lincoln.

The NBE committee of blind licensee has opening for two new committee members to replace recent vacancies. We will be having elections of new officers in May.

We hired a new staff for the Business Manager position who will supervise the Nebraska Business Enterprises and also helping the Business Office. Carrie DeFreece started her six-weeks Center training on January 23.

Break – A break was taken at 12:05 p.m. The meeting resumed at 12:12 p.m.

New Business

Initiate Executive Director's Annual Review Process

The annual review of the executive director will be held at the May Commission meeting. Chair Hansen stated that the Commission Board will use the same procedure for the executive director's annual review process that they used last year. All of the current commissioners were involved in last year's performance review. A self-evaluation form will be sent to the executive director for her to complete. The commissioners will also send an email to Julie Buren and Bill Brown asking for some numbers for their tracking spreadsheet. Part of the process that the Board follows is also communicating with the public and the staff.

Public Comment

Barbara Loos – Barbara reminded everyone to state what acronyms stand for when discussing items during the meeting.

Carol Jenkins – Carol invited everyone to come to tour the remodeled Lincoln offices and the Center after the meeting today.

Nancy Flearl – Nancy passed on a message from Lisa Kelly with Outlook Nebraska as she needed to leave the meeting. Outlook Nebraska has started a Goal Ball League which will be starting on February 11. Lisa encourages people to come and join the League.

Nancy reported that they have collaborated with a lot of entities and have created a vision resource coalition and for the second year they will hold a vision resource fair at Westroads Mall. This will be held on April 29 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Discussion of Focus Topics for Upcoming Meetings

WIOA – Old Rules vs. New Rules – What has changed?

Presentation from the Department of Education

Presentation from NCECBVI (Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired)

Discussion of Meeting Dates and Locations for 2017

May 6, 2017 – Kearney, NE – Annual Review of the Executive Director

July 29, 2017 – Scottsbluff, NE – Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) - Old Rules vs. New Rules – What has changed?

November 4, 2017 – Omaha, NE – Presentation from Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI)

February 3, 2018 – Lincoln, NE - Presentation from the Department of Education

Commissioner Bulger moved to approve the above stated dates and locations for the upcoming NCBVI Commission Board meetings. Commissioner Bell seconded the

motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners present voted in favor of the motion.

Chair Hansen stated that if anyone would like the NCBVI to hold a Commission Board meeting in their area of the State they should contact the commissioners at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov

Final Announcements

Chair Hansen announced that the next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be held in Kearney, Nebraska at a location to be determined.

Adjourn - The meeting adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the May 6, 2017 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant
NCBVI

Mike Hansen, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners